

Despite the successful result of this recent incident (the Maersk Alabama), the problem of piracy in the Gulf of Aden and off the coast of Somalia remains. The international effort, particularly Combined Task Force 151, has succeeded in thwarting a number of these attacks; however the overall number of successful hijackings has continued to rise. We have learned from past and present examples that the only way to deal with these criminals is to seek them out in the coastal safe havens where they are operating. Whether you look at the days of the Barbary pirates where the pirates were eventually defeated ashore in Algiers or the recent example in the Straits of Malacca where the combined forces of Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore worked together to secure their waters. In both of these examples, the victory over the pirates came when they were denied safe havens ashore.

In Somalia, we are seeing the result of a failed state that does not have the capacity to deal with the criminals who are operating with impunity within coastal cities. In the long term, the international community will need to address the conditions contributing to Somalia's instability. Only a state with the full range of governmental functions will prevent these attacks in the future. I would like to understand at the nearest opportunity what options the administration is considering for dealing with this long-term challenge.

Establishing a working government in Somalia is undoubtedly the best solution to the problem of piracy in the region, but as I said, this is the long-term solution. We still must address the current problem: how to stop the attacks in the short term. I encourage you to pursue these pirates beyond the waters we are currently patrolling and into the safe havens where they are operating. Article I, Section 8 of the U.S. Constitution requires no less. Furthermore, established authorities such as United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1846 and 1851 have expanded the ability of international forces to conduct counter-piracy operations within Somali territory. This does not have to be a large operation. In most cases we already know the cities in which they are operating and often even the names of those organizing the attacks. Pirate attacks and rhetoric have only become more brazen in recent months and cannot be allowed to continue.

Until a long term solution to the lack of governance in Somalia is found, the only way we can sufficiently protect our interests in the region is by seeking out the criminals who are responsible for these attacks and hijackings and bring them to justice. I have long warned about the threat of international piracy and the consequences of allowing it to go unchecked. I would like to discuss with the appropriate members of your national security team the options the United States and our international partners should be considering for stemming these attacks and dealing with the longer-term issues of governance and stability in Somalia. I look forward to working with you to make progress on this critical issue.

Rep Ike Skelton

Chairman, House Armed Services Committee

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